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ABSTRACT

The Department of Communication Studies at the University of Northern Iowa has made a commitment to establish and maintain partnerships with its Iowa Communications Network (ICN) based learning communities and with the institutions of higher education throughout the state that facilitate the delivery of experiential learning to students. In January 1997, graduate student enrollment doubled when the department began offering programs in Communication Education and Public Relations over the ICN. The program has moved from a top-down pedagogical model to the creation of a partnership with its learning community. Students in the ICN Communication Education program must successfully complete a non-credit teaching practicum at a university/college/community college to fulfill one of the necessary requirements for licensure in the state of Iowa. Preliminary evaluations have indicated that the department has been effective in its efforts. (Appendixes contain a list of courses in the Communication Education program and the Public Relations program; and graduate teaching practicum evaluation forms for the graduate student, the observer/supervisor, and for the student assessment of the practicum supervisor.) (RS)

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CONSTRUCTING A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITY: DISTANCE EDUCATION

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Constructing a Partnership with the Community: Distance Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Distance learning has become entrenched as a daily fixture in our world. Once the province of universities and colleges' correspondence programs and state operated Instructional Television Fixed Systems, distance learning rapidly expanded as interactive audio and video networks and computer services became operational over the past decade. For example, students across the United States may earn an M.A. in Business Communication through the computer operated International University College or students in Iowa may complete a M.A. in Communication Studies from the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) by taking courses via the Iowa Communications Network (ICN).

In both cases, technology has increased program providers' ability to reach "new" students in new ways. As a result, many students now pursue educational opportunities that once were out of their reach due to geographical or time constraints. While the new opportunity to gain access to content is a plus, programs do not always assure a positive, interactive learning experience between the student and university.

The purpose of this paper is to examine this latter concern in relation to how the distance education M.A. programs offered by the Department of Communication Studies at UNI (Communication Education, Public Relations) have been created through development of a partnership with the learning community.

Specific attention is placed on the development and implementation of the experiential learning component (teaching practicum) in the Communication Education program.

IOWA COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK (ICN)

Iowa lawmakers passed a bill in 1989 that created a fiber optic network capable of handling two-way data, video, and voice transmissions (Kantrowitz & Biddle, 1994; Curriculum Administrator, 1995). The first and second phases of the project, completed in 1993, established links to 15 regional community colleges, 3 regent universities (Iowa State University, the University of Northern Iowa, University of Northern Iowa), each county, Iowa Public Television, and the state capital complex (State of Iowa, 1993; Simonson, 1997). Phase three, which is still under construction, will connect all educational institutions (K-12) throughout the state (Hardman, 1993).

As of February 1997 there were 405 interactive sites. One-hundred ninety-one sites were located at K-12 schools, 68 at community schools, 18 at regent universities, 12 at private colleges/universities, 15 at area educational agencies, 55 at Iowa National Guard facilities, 23 at state agencies, 9 at federal agencies, 8 at hospitals, and 6 at public libraries (Iowa Public Television, Educational Telecommunications, 1997).

Each video ICN classroom contains three cameras (1 aimed at the instructor, 1 aimed at the class, 1 aimed at the teaching console), a lapel microphone, touch-screen computer, table microphones, video playback and recording equipment, slide projector, compact disk and laser disk players, audio cassette

player, and inputs for electronic devices. The instructor uses the touch-screen computer to switch on-line camera sources (e.g., the instructor, students at the origination site, teaching materials, students at a remote site, etc.). Students use the table microphones to communicate with the instructor and students at other sites.

As expected, colleges/universities have made the most extensive use of the network. Between November 1995 and February 7, 1997 higher education accounted for 46% (4,294) of the ICN sessions, K-12 28% (2,582), and administrative agencies 26% (2,362) (Iowa Public Television, Educational Telecommunications, 1997).

GRADUATE PROGRAMS DELIVERED OVER THE ICN BY THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

The Department of Communication Studies offers an M.A. in Communication Studies with emphases in communication education (with or without community college licensure), general communication studies (interpersonal communication, group processes, etc.), mass communication, organizational communication, performance studies, and public relations. There are 25 graduate faculty members, who support 30-35 on-campus students.

In January 1997 graduate student enrollment doubled when the department began offering programs in Communication Education and Public Relations over the ICN. The Communication Education Program, which provides community college certification in Iowa, is being delivered to 12 students. Ten of the students are at

three off-campus sites (Des Moines, West Union/North Fayette, Mason City) and two are at the university's origination site. Ten of the students are female and all but one are full-time teachers. Degree requirements include 32 hours of course work, a comprehensive exam, a non-credit M.A. Research Paper, a non-credit teaching practicum, and a presentation at the graduate colloquium (Refer to Appendix A for a complete list of program requirements).

The Public Relations Program is being delivered to 16 students, 15 at 5 off-campus sites (Bettendorf, Cedar Rapids, Colfax, Dubuque, Sioux City) and 1 at the university's origination site. Fourteen of the sixteen students are female; over half hold management positions in the field (director or coordinator of public/community relations, communication officers for their employers, president of a public relations/marketing firm, etc.). Degree requirements include 32 hours of course work, a comprehensive exam, a non-credit M.A. Research Paper, and a presentation at the graduate colloquium (Refer to Appendix B for a complete list of program requirements).

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE LEARNING COMMUNITY

The Communication Education and Public Relations ICN graduate programs at UNI were developed and currently operate under a partnership model, which continues to evolve over time. This section of the paper identifies methods the program has employed to move from a top-down pedagogical model to the creation of a partnership with its learning community.

Attendance Policies

Non-traditional students working full-time as secondary english or speech teachers or public relations practitioners have busy schedules that contain numerous obligations (parent-teacher conferences, school theatre productions, corporate travel, family responsibilities, etc.). The likelihood of a student missing one or two class sessions a semester because of professional or family obligations is high.

Rather than treat absences in a traditional manner where the instructor many times questions the student's time management skills or commitment to the class/program, the ICN programs assume some absences will be inevitable. To accommodate students' absences, class sessions are videotaped and distributed through the mail. As a result, students perceive the program working with and for them rather than against them.

Transfer Credits

Junior high and high school teachers in Iowa are required to take college level courses and workshops to maintain certification. This ongoing educational process was taken into consideration when developing the ICN Communication Education Program. Rather than force students to take a prescribed program that may or may not connect to their previous course work, the ICN M.A. program accepts up to nine transfer credits. Which, if any, credits can be applied to the program is determined by the Director of Graduate Studies and the Coordinator of the ICN Communication Education Program. In numerous cases, relevant workshops or courses have been substituted for workshop credits

contained in the program.

Flexible Scheduling

History and tradition are factors that a department must struggle with when delivering an existing graduate program to distance learners. For example, the sequencing and scheduling of courses are often the same for both on and off-campus programs. A potential problem with this process is that it does not take into consideration the differences between students. Ultimately, what works on campus (sequencing or scheduling courses, constructing content, etc.) may not meet the needs of the off-campus student.

During the ICN programs these differences have surfaced on several occasions. During the first summer of the ICN Communication Education Program the students came to campus to complete a four-week session. While at UNI, they quickly pointed out that the program was designed around a traditional summer session of four or eight weeks, which would cause problems the following summer when they were scheduled to take six credit hours (Listening, Studies in Communication Research Methodology, and Workshop).

For most of the students the projected schedule was highly undesirable because they would have no summer "down time" if courses were scheduled for an eight-week period extending from early June to the beginning of August. Students also felt that they could not give an adequate amount of attention to two courses if they were both scheduled in the first four-week session. In addition, students believed that they would get the

most out of the methodology course if it was their only responsibility for a part of the summer.

In order to meet students' perceived needs, enhance the educational experience, and solidify a working partnership a more flexible schedule (Listening, Friday 4-6:30 & Saturday 9-2, May 15-16, 1998; Studies in Communication Research Methodology, Tuesday-Thursday 6-9:50, June 9-July 2, 1998; Workshop, Friday & Saturday 8:30-4:30, July 10-11, 1998) was created.

During the current semester (Fall 1998) students in the Public Relations program have identified several topics for the Summer 1999 workshop. In order to directly meet student needs and create a working partnership, students will select the workshop topic (Image Building or Crisis Management) via ballot.

Travel to Remote Sites

Isolation and an interactive learning environment are two topics that have received a great deal of attention in the distance education literature. A review of the literature reveals that students at remote sites are more likely to feel isolated from the teacher and other students than students at origination sites. Students at remote sites are also less likely to participate in the interactive environment if they feel isolated from others.

One way that a department can try to overcome the isolation factor and express commitment to the distance learner is through the creation of a dynamic interactive learning community where all students feel a sense of belonging. In order to reach this, faculty in the ICN programs try to originate at least one class

from every site each semester as a community building strategy.

The ability to change origination sites throughout the programs has been warmly received by students at remote sites. They have been appreciative of our commitment to them and have enjoyed the direct interpersonal contact that occurs when an instructor and students are in the same room.

Travel to remote sites has not been limited to course instructors. During this semester (Fall 1998) the Director of Graduate Studies visited each site to observe class sessions and to hold informational meetings with students. During the informational meetings remaining course requirements, such as comprehensive exams, final research papers, graduate colloquium presentations, and non-credit teaching practicums, were discussed in detail. Using this up-close, personal approach to address complex, sensitive topics was greatly appreciated by all students. In many cases, students viewed the visit/discussion as a symbol of commitment and/or partnership.

Comprehensive Exams

Graduate students take comprehensive examinations near the end of their program of study. Each student must respond to questions in a minimum of three areas (theory, methodology, one or more areas of specialization) over a six-hour period. Traditionally, comprehensive exams have been scheduled on-campus the first Saturday in November and the last Saturday in March or the first Saturday in April. Rather than require all students at distance sites to travel to campus in late fall or early spring the department is taking the exam to some origination sites.

Specifically, the Director of Graduate Studies and students from sites with an enrollment of three or more are working together to create a more flexible comprehensive exam schedule.

As of this writing arrangements have been made for the Director of Graduate Studies to administer the exam to five public relations students in the computer lab at Bettendorf High School on March 27. Arrangements have also been finalized so that nine students (7 communication education, 1 public relations, 1 non-traditional student who was pursuing the program on-campus and recently moved to the area) will take their exam in the computer lab at Urbandale High School on May 22.

DEVELOPING A PARTNERSHIP WITH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION: THE TEACHING PRACTICUM

Students in the ICN Communication Education Program must successfully complete a non-credit teaching practicum at a university/college/community college to fulfill one of the necessary requirements for community college licensure in the state of Iowa. Before the development of the ICN program this requirement was usually satisfied by having the student assist a faculty member in the delivery of an on-campus course.

While the on-campus experience still remains an option, it is viewed as a backup plan by the department for several reasons. First, the distance between the university and the student's home could create a financial burden (living expenses if the student moved to the campus location for the teaching practicum, travel costs between the student's home and campus, etc.) if the student assisted in the delivery of an on-campus course. Second, a

majority of the students in the program plan to teach at a community college on a full or part-time basis in the future. While a UNI teaching practicum experience would no doubt be invaluable, it would not provide students with a connection to a university/college/community college near their home. As a result, the program has tried to develop partnerships with institutions of higher education across the state. This section of the paper examines the elements of the experiential teaching requirement and how a partnership as been constructed between UNI and other institutions of higher education.

Non-credit Teaching Practicums

The practicum is a teaching/learning experience in the area of licensure (Communications) under the supervision of a primary instructor. Students perform a variety of roles, which must include planning, teaching, and assessment components. To be eligible for a teaching practicum a student must have completed at least nine hours in the graduate program. To apply for a practicum the student submits a proposal, in conjunction with the participating college teacher, that specifies how he/she will meet the planning, teaching, and assessment requirements. The proposal is evaluated by the Director of Graduate Studies and one or more Communication Education faculty members. After the proposal (original or revised) is accepted the student may begin the practicum.

A student's practicum experience is evaluated by the student, supervising instructor, Director of Graduate Studies, and students enrolled in the supervising instructor's course.

At the conclusion of the practicum the student completes a questionnaire that assesses the quality of the practicum experience. Questionnaire items address the relationship between the student and supervising instructor, methods used to teach course content, evaluation tools used to assess learning, and overall communication competence in the classroom. (See Appendix C for a complete list of questionnaire items). A copy of the completed questionnaire goes to the supervising instructor and a copy is kept on file by the Director of Graduate Studies.

The supervising instructor completes a more detailed questionnaire that examines the practicum student's knowledge and delivery of course content, orientation toward students, classroom management skills, use of appropriate evaluation tools, professionalism, institutional awareness, and personal qualities. At the end of the questionnaire the supervising instructor specifies whether or nor the student has successfully completed the practicum. (See Appendix D for a complete list of questionnaire items). The completed questionnaire is kept on file by the Director of Graduate Studies.

On one or more occasions during the practicum the Director of Graduate Studies travels to the remote site and observes the student teaching in the classroom. Observations about the student's knowledge and delivery of content, interactions with audience members (enrolled students), classroom management skills, professionalism, assessment techniques, and personal characteristics are recorded and kept on file.

Students enrolled in the class also complete a teaching

evaluation instrument that addresses the practicum student's performance in the class. (See Appendix E for a complete list of evaluation items). The completed forms are given to the Director of Graduate Studies who keeps them on file. A copy of the evaluations are sent to the practicum student after final grades have been submitted by the supervising instructor.

Construction of a Partnership Between UNI and Other Institutions of Higher Education

During the summer of 1997 the Director of Graduate Studies traveled to universities/colleges/community colleges within a 50-mile radius of all ICN Communication Education sites for the ultimate purpose of establishing teaching practicums. At each institution the Director of Graduate Studies visited with a "key" administrator (Sr. Vice President for Academic Affairs, Vice President of Academic Affairs, Vice President of Instruction, Dean of the College, Director of Teacher Certification) to determine if the institution was willing to pursue the establishment of a teaching practicum in the spring or summer of 1999. Twelve institutions agreed to pursue the practicum issue beyond the initial meeting. Not surprisingly, a majority of these institutions were community colleges.

The subsequent process by which teaching practicums have been developed at these institutions has varied. In one instance, the Director of Graduate Studies presented a formal presentation at a luncheon hosted by the communication faculty of a community college. In another instance, the Director of Graduate Studies worked through the administrative chain of

command (Sr. Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean, Faculty Member) via telephone contacts.

While the process by which practicums have been developed has varied, the basic interinstitutional guidelines established for student placement have remained constant. In each case, the Director of Graduate Studies has established practicum opportunities for students in the program. After a faculty member at the institution has initially agreed to serve as a supervisor, the Director of Graduate Studies has contacted the student and scheduled an interview. After the interview, the faculty member can accept or reject the opportunity to work with the student. If the faculty member accepts the role of practicum supervisor, then the two begin preparation of a practicum proposal.

Initial plans did not call for an ICN Communication Education student to pursue a practicum until spring/summer 1999. However, the timetable was changed when one student decided to complete the requirement during the summer of 1998. Within four weeks of the student's request, a practicum was established at a community college within easy driving distance of the student's home. A viable proposal was constructed and subsequently approved in a timely manner. The actual practicum experience was perceived very positively by all parties (student, supervising instructor, Director of Graduate Studies, enrolled students), and has resulted in a stronger working partnership between the institutions.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Northern Iowa has made a commitment to establish and maintain partnerships with its ICN based learning communities and with the institutions of higher education throughout the state that facilitate the delivery of experiential learning to some of these students. Preliminary evaluations have indicated that the department has been effective in its efforts. These partnerships, which continue to evolve over time, are critical to the creation of a positive, interactive learning experience and deserve continued attention.

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APPENDIX A

COMMUNICATION EDUCATION PROGRAM

Courses

Spring 1997	Language and Communication	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1997	Introduction to Graduate Study and Research	3 credits	UNI
Summer 1997	The Two-Year College	3 credits	UNI
Fall 1997	Seminar in Communication Education: Teaching at the College Level	3 credits	ICN
Spring 1998	Interpersonal Communication	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1998	Listening	2 credits	ICN
Summer 1998	Studies in Communication Research Methodology	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1998	Workshop	1 credit	ICN
Fall 1998	Communication Theory	3 credits	ICN
Spring 1999	Seminar in Communication Education: Distance Learning	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1999	Seminar in Performance Studies	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1999	Workshop	2 credits	ICN

Additional Requirements

* Non-credit Teaching Practicum
* Comprehensive Exam
* M.A. Research Paper
* Presentation at the Graduate Colloquium
* A Course in Human Relations (if not previously taken)

APPENDIX B

PUBLIC RELATIONS PROGRAM

Spring 1997	Seminar in Public Relations: Contemporary Practice & Issues	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1997	Marketing Management	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1997	Workshop	1 credit	ICN
Fall 1997	Introduction to Graduate Study and Research	3 credits	ICN
Spring 1998	Interpersonal Communication	3 credits	ICN
Spring 1998	Seminar in Public Relations	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1998	Studies in Communication Research Methodology	3 credits	ICN
Fall 1998	Public Relations: Integrated Communication	3 credits	ICN
Spring 1999	Communication Theory	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1999	Leadership and Organizational Behavior	3 credits	ICN
Summer 1999	Workshop	1 credit	ICN
Fall 1999	Language and Communication	3 credits	ICN

Additional Requirements

* Comprehensive Exam
* M.A. Research Paper
* Presentation at the Graduate Colloquium

APPENDIX C

GRADUATE TEACHING PRACTICUM EVALUATION FORM (GRADUATE STUDENT)

Near the end of the teaching practicum, the department asks the practicum student to complete the following questions to assess the quality of her or his experience. This is particularly important since this non-credit assignment is used as an equivalency to meet the practicum requirement for Iowa Community College Teaching Licensure. A copy of the completed evaluation will go to the supervising instructor and a copy will be kept on file in the offices of the Director of Graduate Studies. The information gathered is intended for internal departmental use only.

Name_____

Practicum Supervisor _____

Course Title_____

Semester _____

1. List duties you were responsible for in teaching the course:

2. Regarding the duties listed above, do you feel you were given adequate orientation to perform these tasks as the instructor expected? If not, please note the item(s) from the list above and explain.

3. Please describe the frequency and duration of meetings with your teaching supervisor regarding the practicum?

4. Did you receive adequate and timely feedback from your supervisor regarding your performance? Explain.

5. Describe the primary ways in which you feel you benefited from the teaching practicum. In doing so, you may wish to comment on some of the categories your students and supervisor will assess you on:

   -Knowledge in Course Content

   -Methods for Teaching this Information

   -Effective Evaluation Tools to Assess Learning

   -Interpersonal Communication Skills with Students

   -Communication Competence in the Classroom

6. In what ways could your practicum experiences have been improved?

7. What is your overall rating of your teaching practicum experience?

   Excellent Good Fair Poor Very Poor

8. Any other observations you wish to share?

APPENDIX D

GRADUATE TEACHING PRACTICUM EVALUATION FORM
(OBSERVER/SUPERVISOR)

Name of Student: _____
Class/section/time: _____
Days/dates observed: _____

Signature of Supervisor/Observer: _____

IDENTIFY THE DEGREE OF FREQUENCY THE BEHAVIORS WERE OBSERVED BY CIRCLING THE APPROPRIATE DESCRIPTION FOR EACH ITEM BELOW:

REGULARLY FREQUENTLY SELDOM NOT OBSERVED NOT APPLICABLE

I. Content/Methods:

R F S NO NA - demonstrates knowledge of relevant content
R F S NO NA - identifies central concepts
R F S NO NA - explains concepts being taught
R F S NO NA - uses material to engage students with different learning styles
R F S NO NA - demonstrates a variety of teaching methods
R F S NO NA - uses a variety of both positive and negative feedback
R F S NO NA - uses a variety of questioning strategies

II. Student Orientation:

R F S NO NA - accepts a range of student comments and actions
R F S NO NA - perceives and adjusts to differing needs of students
R F S NO NA - demonstrates ability to relate to different student populations and needs

III. Management:

R F S NO NA - maintains a degree of order appropriate to the lesson
R F S NO NA - exhibits a variety of management techniques

IV. Evaluation:

R F S NO NA - establishes criteria for the evaluation of learning
R F S NO NA - demonstrates use of a variety of evaluation tools
R F S NO NA - demonstrates competence in oral and written critiquing

V. Professionalism:

R F S NO NA - appears to be at ease in front of students
R F S NO NA - appears to be at ease in front of supervisor
R F S NO NA - dresses in a professional manner
R F S NO NA - exhibits "common sense"
R F S NO NA - acts in a professional manner with students, colleagues, faculty, and supervisor
R F S NO NA - attends class regularly

VI. Institutional Awareness:

R F S NO NA - demonstrates knowledge of various aspects of the University, the College, the department, especially as they influence the classroom
R F S NO NA - demonstrates knowledge of the roles of non-teaching personnel in the overall functioning of the department
R F S NO NA - follows departmental polices and procedures related to teaching

VII. Personal Qualities:

R F S NO NA - appears promptly for commitments
R F S NO NA - follows through on assigned responsibilities
R F S NO NA - is conscientious in her/his attendance at classes/meetings
R F S NO NA - adapts to new situations
R F S NO NA - accepts suggestions given by the supervisor
R F S NO NA - initiates conferences with supervisor about concerns (e.g., problem students, problem behaviors, paperwork)
R F S NO NA - appears normally energetic
R F S NO NA - appears to enjoy teaching this subject to the learners
R F S NO NA - demonstrates independent decision-making
R F S NO NA - exhibits ethical behavior appropriate to the teaching position

IN YOUR OPINION, HAS THIS STUDENT SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED THE TEACHING PRACTICUM? CHECK ONLY ONE:

_____ Yes

_____ No

Additional comments/suggestions/concerns:

APPENDIX E

GRADUATE TEACHING PRACTICUM EVALUATION FORM (STUDENT ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICUM INSTRUCTOR)

Students: Please answer the following items based on the Graduate Practicum Student's specific performance in the class, not based on the course as a whole. You need not put your name on this evaluation. Your responses will be kept confidential and the practicum student will not see the responses until after final grades are filed.

Rate the following items by circling 1-5, using the scale below:

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Applicable	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

1 2 3 4 5	Learning materials are well prepared for class
1 2 3 4 5	Presentations are well organized
1 2 3 4 5	Communicates clearly
1 2 3 4 5	Demonstrates knowledge of subject matter
1 2 3 4 5	Is prepared for class
1 2 3 4 5	Is approachable
1 2 3 4 5	Exhibits supportive behaviors toward students
1 2 3 4 5	Models effective communication skills

Has the Graduate Practicum Student enhanced your learning?

_____ Yes _____ No

Please list teaching strengths of the Graduate Practicum Student:

Please list any suggestions to improve the Graduate Practicum Student's teaching: